diptych with profs

© LETTERS

OUTRUN

Hey Steve, I just saw the EXISTERE interview from a coupla yrs back & thot you'd be interested to know the origin of the so-called Outsider 'movement'.

1993, Victor convened a meet of smallies at Coach House to contemplate formation of TSPG. He was living on Spadina with Alice, writing his Lipograms & getting back into the scene in a more seminal capacity. Citing the incentive of official funding he encouraged us to formalize our association, a presentiment i found & still find insufferably repugnant. I stood alone in resisting the proposition but all in attendance ignored my arguments in favour of the almighty goad of govt graft.

I take exception to exclusive group dynamics because with formal association come membership criteria & a hierarchy of administrative execs assuming authority. To me the informal smallpress association represents a more nurturing context: no conditions precluding membership; a progressive alternative portending an inclusive group dynamic where anyone's welcome to participate; no aims, fees or measures on which to stratify involvement – a lateral community invoked purely thru communication.

After selling his papers to the National Libry, storing some stuff with me & filing the paperwork for TSPG, Victor moved (with Alice) out to BC, 12 Novem 93, the same day a handstamped invite arrived in the mail from curry convening an unofficial smallpress meet on the tracks behind the Summerhill liquorstore:

10PM 13NOV93 [train engine] Since the Toronto Small Press Group has proven to be a source of distress to some of us (& since we 3'll be meeting this Saturday anyway), we thought it might be fun to invite a few others along on our next ride to nowhere to discuss possible future

actions devoid of the compulsion of TSPG affiliation. Please join us for wine, weed & warmth (bring a heavy blanket or sleeping bag – we'll have coffee on-site) on the CP Rail bridge at the historical North Toronto Station on Yonge (now an LCBO outlet). Walk north on the west side of Yonge from Marlborough Avenue & follow the signs until you find us all. precipitationary warning: if it comes down, we meet up top anyway (there's shelter by the clock tower) & work out what to do from there. [4pp, stamped four colours]

I arrived second, to encounter Katy Chan on the steps up to the overpass unable to find the designated area or locate any of the others. I went up top wandering around in the dark but nothing stood out until Stan Bevington emerged from the other side of the tracks. Together we searched to no avail, then returned to Katy on the st. Owen arrived, then Marshall Hryciuk, but still no curry & co. Turned out officer 156 platoon 4 of the indisputably efficient CP police unit, had unceremoniously detained them at the Shaftesbury prospect to present them with um tickets for trespassing.

So, conceding the tracks we claimed a couple of picnic tables in the pie-slice parkette on Marlborough & proceeded to run the rapids of an interminable torrent of toasts well into the whee hrs. I'd biked in from Parkdale in considerable distress having bin knocked off my bike a month earlier by a car, in hopes of tabling a litany of objections, but the current proved too turbulent for even the most buoyant digression, forcing me yet again to shelve those irritating petty differences.

A quorum, in consolation, in raucous unanimity: curry, bradley, owen, stan, me, marshall, katy & lance larocque.

Back home i conceived the idea of an anthology to relay my concerns, & set about stamping representative texts in editions of 8, with the inaugural piece Stan's rejoinder to me back in 86 when i tried to get him to give me something for the twobitter series: "the distinction in Canada is remaining unpublished". I also scratched up an account of the event in an until then irregular journal, the first entry in what wd become the 26-volume so-called Outsider Journal (2140pp embracing 1491 days

or 49 months thru Novem 97 – the 49th wk of 97, my 49th yr – all on smallpress).

Patchen followed with "I have armed myself against their weapons. To be so indolent that the flies will bury their dead on my eyelids. To sit on a beach & let the waves comb all endeavor out of me. To live in such manner that I never make a single, blood-rotten dollar. To study history in order only to have it to forget. Books – all those big, fat-bottomed ashcans where men empty their lives." and "The great man fell asleep with open mouth in a room full of flies. From that day his work took a gloomy turn. The man was Marcel Proust & the flies were Tommy & Winnie & Little Meg: all dead now."

Then bp's *Angel of Mercy;* Victor's *Pleasures of the Dirty Page* (actual copies of this late 60s Coach House leaflet tipped in); & the postscript to a running editorial by legendary smallpress publisher, Jon Edgar Webb: "And finally – today, March 6, 1963, as I bend exhausted over the type-case feebly picking this out, with only the contributors notes & the layout for the back inside cover to do to wind up the issue, permit me to record for future generations of "little" mag editors that, with The Outsider's right foot firmly wedged in the doorway to success, we today have on hand 30 cents in cash & 6 four-cent stamps in the postage box. How we're going to mail out the 2100 copies we printed of number 3 we don't know."

This was backed up by Mina Loy's funereal retreat "but it is necessary to stay very unknown.. to maintain my incognito the hazard I chose was poet" complementing a cravan croon "sitting here / listening to the crickets / a thousand / miles away".

And Tuli Kupferberg's auto-immune bumper stickler: "Think global Act local".

When john found out about it he started stamping as well, the next contribution Wharton Hood's *Cantilever III*. At the same time Owen undertook to print 8 sets of his snaps of the event.

Then came my d. a. levy excerpt (on used liquorstore brownbags) backed with Doug Blazek; succeeded by john's Zappa grabber, *For Calvin,* backed with bissett's *awarmplacetoshit.*

Next my William Wantling homage, *The Heat:* "this time they want me for Living without Believing for Working without Slavery Playing without Patterns and Loving without Misery"; backed with Souster's *Place of Meeting:* "always beware the leader who talks with God and leaves you to do the dirty work".

john's Houedard Basho startle backed with D. M. Fraser's "One day I will have to acknowledge that the only story is the world, and action the only language in which to tell it."

And my Beatrice Hastings backhander: "The misery is so quiet that you may sit next to it quite awhile before catching that dreadful gesture of the hand to the dizzy head. When I say that the concierges like one woman chase away from the courts starving singers & musicians, many of whom a few weeks ago were employed in the cabarets on the boulevards, I only give a faint hint of the universal & systematic suppression of everything but grief & grocery." The first little editor, benefactor of Pound & all litry modernism, she lends a perfectly flagrant figurehead to the prow of our scandalous little craft.

Backed with Tuli's accomplice Fug, Ed Sanders: "There has been great discussion of the New Freedom in the Arts. The facts are that the old line totalitarian fuckhaters, those who shudder at the thought of a guiltless freak-cock grooved into a moist cunt or trembling mouth, but love it when a bazooka blasts off the head of a gook in South Vietnam, are still in power!! Shit!"

En face with Gerry Gilbert's: "Moan of the broken toy the world is".

Then William Hawkins's *Word:* "The firecracker in a world of bombs waiting for the right moment".

Backed with Cobbing's "hari harita liska ling chih hari harita sar-costemma brevistigma soma haoma soma soma haoma o".

Followed by Gæl Turnbull's *Song:* "Gone along lanes alone"; and a Parisian coda by Robert McAlmon.

Then john with *Missy;* backed with Shaunt Basmajian's "the poem waits for a decision…".

And Sadakichi Hartmann on æsthetic integrity: "The profanation of natural gifts is inexcusable, the lowest vice imaginable. Only those authors & painters, who, if all opportunities of ever selling a book or picture were lost, would still continue to write & paint, are in my estimation genuine artists. In this way, the amateur is frequently superior to the professional."

Backed with Judson Crews indicting our august elders as toads (a tradition of warts); en face with Bukowski's *Cause and Effect:* "the best often die by their own hand just to get away, and those left behind can never quite understand why anybody would ever want to get away from them". Backed by Bill Griffiths's *Curfew.*

And finally john & Gio's *Bird'snails;* fading into Don Van Vliet's lingering chorus "hobo chang ba".

Followed by a facsimile of the invite & 17 original prints by Owen (5 snapped by Lance on the hop north – the one of him by john, alone in colour) with Bradley's "smallpress meeting upstairs" sign from the event bound in between snaps; & facsimiles of the trespass tag plus another Owen incurred out front of curry's the night we delivered the sheets (24 Decem 93) beneath the flaps.

I did the title-page, covers (with 3 additions by john) & colophon leaf; john sewed it up. While Will Rueter volunteered to produce two-piece chemises & slipcases covered with handprinted Japanese paper sporting letterpress labels, at his Aliquando Press – even tho he wdn't receive a copy of the anthology.

I dedicated the project to Larry Wallrich who had just died, because his Phœnix Bookshop (late 50s Greenwich Village) was, with City Lights in SF, among the earliest alternative repositories to focus on smallpress, & wore the holey Harris tweed i'd inherited from his estate to the event reprising the mantle of that pioneer devotion.

Titled *Minutes of the Last Meeting* (after the biography of Sadakichi Hartmann), its title-page sports the imprint: The Outsider Six Seven Eight.

Jon & Gypsy Lou Webb had managed to produce entirely by hand five issues of their legendary Outsider magazine (in four volumes, 1961–9) before succumbing to stress & poverty, their heroic independence reverently resounded in deepest homage. Nothing in the smallpress has ever come close to the raw elegance of their vision. The impression of three issues bound as one, in our case, for the 3 dubious entities primping in the colophon: martin garth, room 302 & ecs. And we decided to ascribe the thing to Lance because he was the effective outsider among us (light an imprint), the open eye in transit tracing shadows of the passed.

Lined up, the 8 volumes enclosed in their slipcases resembled a night-train caught thru the wire fence separating us from the tracks. Will had printed the elephant paper with an under-texture of deep green (2 passes) overlaid with a lattice of black lines realized by winding his roller in string dipped in black ink – a masterful effect.

The title further projects the epitaph of ludicrous formality (echoes of Burroughs with *Minutes to Go*), the formation of TSPG about as pressing to the reflective smallie as the Incorporation of Humanity itself.

The edition was completed 11 Feb 94; Jonesie offed himself 2 days later. His corpse was discovered on the 14th (art's Valentine) & when i learned of the tragedy the following day i promptly tapped up his poem, *Things that I Have Put into My Asshole,* & headed down to Alicos on College to run off an edition of 300 in memoriam (for which, thru a screwup, they charged double, tapping me out). On my return I called curry then Owen in search of a staple-gun, no thot of enlisting further complicity, but each unhesitatingly volunteered to accompany me later that night in posting the wallflower, despite the blizzard.

Two outside events which set me musing to the resonance of an outsider harmonic – actively taking things to the st in symbolic affirmation of Patchen's & Souster's commitment to spread the word beyond the tidy precinct of the academy. An echo further bearing fond memories of 2 yrs selling assorted rags from the underground press on the st (1967/8: first *Satyrday* in Yorkville; then my own paper *Small Change* in Fort William; & finally *Harbinger* back in Yorkville); of guerilla revisions

to the Intercity billboard (1968); & of a more recent venture fruitlessly hawking my Upper Canada broadsheet in Nathan Phillips Square & at Harbourfront during bicentennial celebrations for the province (31 July 93). [see *Millennial Report on Independent Letters,* 1999]

So two Outsider publications, followed shortly after by the induction of bpNichol Lane (30 April 94), which coincided with our first two-day smallpress fair. Stan had suggested painting a poem in the lane for the event but i urged him to cut it & spent the night scouring beep's books before settling on what has come to be known as the lanepome (in *Extreme Positions*). Five months later i threw a 50th birthday bash for bp at Coach House (30 Septem 94) – during which curry & i issued grOnkbag L – Daniel strewing his beatific *Angles of Mercy* installation homage the length of the lane for the festivity.

A month later Owen conducted his epic walking tour of core Cob-sites during Beth Learn's weekend Language Show (30 Octo 94), for which he & Rick Smith produced the essential P.Cob bædeker. Then came curry's brilliant travelling exhibition, *Of or from Cabooses,* installed surreptitiously latenight 5 Novem 94 in caboose CP 434661 (while we held candles), a show of rail snaps which made the circuit because the images of train culture kept the crews from taking it down.

And again the following Valentine's eve Owen, curry, Bradley, Rick Smith & i headed out to spray Jonesie's memory across the map, Owen having laboriously cut an immense stencil (twice!) to project the piece back in mind with the utmost effect. As you know 3 succeeding Jonesday memorials followed (96–8) before the gesture was effectively retired, Venright, Barlow, Books & Connery among those enlisting for the annual tour of duty.

As you can see, the focus thru those 5 yrs of Outsider activity (93–8) was on events outside. Echoes of Barbusse, Kafka, Hesse, Camus, Wilson & Webb ran in predictably with the wash, but if there was any coherence to the exhibits it had nothing to do with us being left out of anything (i played token outsider to the TSPG not by omission but by choice), but rather that we felt there simply wasn't enough of a display of support for

the disenfranchised in this world. Those on the st, out of hope, disfigured, neglected, demeaned – in short, precisely what its detractors indicted as the most pathetic fallacy of litry Humanism. We remonstrated for the littleman, not wanting to be part of an ethos which excluded anyone, and believed that the oppression of the many by the few was perpetuated by exclusive language. Which doesn't mean we necessarily identified with the little guy.

And while we weren't bent on excluding academics, we never hesitated to attack those among them who rejected creative efforts because of their perceived level of insight or accomplishment – like Geoffrey Hill recently demeaning unschooled poetry as an insult to superior intelligence, in the Paris Review; or the general authoritarian unwillingness to entertain unprecedented effects – we simply cd not understand this impulse to dismiss any creative possibility.

But beyond that the 'movement' was a spoof! pure fraud! impossible! because the moment you joined such a thing you were automatically relieved of the distinction of being an outsider. The lovely irony of Webb's rag was that it pointed up the insecurity of all so-called schools in a realm where individuality prevails as the most creditable currency. The language is ours. It may have rules, but some of us contend they're there to be broken (not merely observed). Which of course presumes familiarity.

I adopted an exemplary approach to art early on, aware that no single medium, idiom or ideology cd ever absorb my curiosity. The artist, for me, is a universal receptor, hungry for fluency in the terms of all we have to consider. An examplar of the æsthetic obligation to engage every assertion by posing its alternative – the artist assuming the persona of antithesis (a devil's advocate presuming fluency). The art in my pseudonym, in this regard: merely a figment from Beckett's trash.

I don't believe in artists. Everyone's creative! It's hardly news: discriminating between the common joe & the so-called artist proves fatal to a truly creative nexus. Which is why i chose to evade recognition as an artist (my writing all done in letters, a calling the pros seldom deem art).

Far from feeling that my "work has been ignored, or that [i've] been shut out of something" as you put it, i measure the success of my efforts by how removed i succeed in remaining from the group dynamic (including the so-called outsiders). I set out to see how much i cd publish in Canada without being noticed, not in quest of consolation, but to underscore how oblivious people in the arts can be (audience, our most creative deficiency). Socially, however, i hang out with the same people; but you might be surprised to learn how little we share in vantage.

Nor do i blame academics for anything other than misappropriating the lingual trust of tradition. It's a simple distinction: you either use language to clarify or to obfuscate. Those "priviliged in terminology" who exercise their fluency to personal advantage have less integrity than those who turn their education to common advantage. Using big words to dominate rather than emancipate the littleman remains the greatest crime in the language. Your confusion over this fundamental academic distinction seems predicated in the puerile perception that i somehow find reading in a school libry preternaturally inferior to reading at home. But as you know, the motive wood of Academy in the Platonic ideal merely fenced curriculum. Nor shd you lose sight of the fact that I too attended York.

Writing is reading; but too many academics i know have never bothered to read a thing by Gordon Allen, Tara Azzopardi, John Barlow, Shaunt Basmajian, bill bissett, Jennifer Books, Scott Bowering, Daniel Bradley, Alice Burdick, Herbert Burke, Juan Butler, Bryan Carson, Barbara Caruso, Norman Chadwick, Mark Connery, Mike Constable, Peter Culley, jwcurry, Kevin Davies, Ben Donoghue, Judith Doyle, Margaret Dragu, Tim Dunn, Ken Eisler, Maria Erskine, Greg Evason, Chris Faiers, Roberta Fairbrother, Robert Flanagan, D. M. Fraser, Raymond Fraser, David Fujino, Elsa Gidlow, Ron Giii, Gerry Gilbert, Artie Gold, Paul Haines, David Harris, William Hawkins, Martha Hillhouse, David Hlynsky, Marshall Hryciuk, Arlene Hunter, Bill Hutton, Hans Jewinski, brian david johnston, Daniel Jones, Istvan Kantor, Bill Kennedy, Cliff Kennedy, Crad Kilodney, Tom Kryss, Nobua Kobota,

Mark Laba, Ed Lacey, Tim Lander, Red Lane, John Laughlin, Beth Learn, Peggy lefler, billy little, Dorothy Lusk, Bob Mallory, Floris McLaren, Toby MacLennan, Antje Meyer-Erlach, George Miller, Kit Miller, Gustave Morin, Gordon Murray, George Nasir, Opal Nations, Al Neil, Padraig O'Broin, Joe O'Sullivan, D. M. Owen, Susan Parker, Andrew Paterson, Maureen Paxton, Stefan Pilipa, Nick Power, Jamie Reid, John Riddell, Childe Roland, Alfred Rushton, Rob Ruzic, Gregg Simpson, Bob Snider, Sarah Spracklin, Sharon Stevenson, Andrew Suknaski, Allan Sutterfield, John Thompson, Dennis Tourbin, Michael Tweed, Ed Varney, Steve Venright, Joe Wallace, Arno Wolfe or Ludwig Zeller.

That's why they're outsiders, not because they "subscribe to a certain ideology, or have proven themselves sufficiently initiated" (tho fiercely independent & heartily unconventional). Their lack of recognition among those who teach creative writing, write reviews & sit on the almighty art juries translates into a consuming obliviation greater than anything the least promising pupils in those classes – who seem to have little trouble getting grants immediately on graduating – will ever endure.

Which is what i set out to redress through the line i focused on in my shop, published under my imprints, featured in my reading series, & promoted thru my essays: those wet with initiative who, deserting ambition, slipped thru the cracks. I summoned the outsiders together in an imaginary convocation (cognizant of the speciousness of the category), to effect a phenomenon which might prove more resilient to the acid of this institutional indifference – which, need i add, is regularly flushed thru the 'official' chain of command, as consummate authority. Presumptuous, to say the least, that anyone might assume authority in CanLit without ever being aware of all they've ignored.

My apparent emphasis on st art, however, shd not be viewed as a preference. I think the obliviation of art outside the definitions of the academy requires redressing, period. My appetite for Pound, Stevens, Olson, Pynchon, Shakespeare, Bowering, *et al* – not to mention the theory invoked in my own work – ought to make it clear that i reject a categorical distinction between st & schooled art. I've always maintained

art shd be evaluated on its terms not yrs; but the problem is that so few academic 'authorities' know how to appreciate the work of Charles Bukowski, say, or Alfred Jarry, nor do they care. And in my book, redress does not preclude dressing the part.

The notion that common language, or the vernacular, might only convey simple things while complex figures & forms are required for complicated insights, simply ignores the difference between making a distinction (intelligence) & categorizing it (intellect). Complex discriminations do not require complex language. Nor do complex figures, or the so-called poetic language of myth, make for greater insights (or art). How much sophistry skirts extremes to elaborate intellectual distinctions which fail to advance any intelligent discrimination greater than a commonplace! At the expense, i might add, of the uninvoluting wind of an incontrovertible visionary like Gerry Gilbert say.

Industry not idiom distinguishes smallpress activity. Academic smallies like derek beaulieu are as eagerly received as so-called st artists like curry – the effort they themselves invest in their productions making all our difference. I remain militant in my support of independent production, in opposition to the general shrug lumping all smallpress enterprises together. The cultural revolution which resulted from broad access to the press has yet to be recognized by most people (let alone digested), but there's little question about the relative resonance of the independent handjob next to the stock effect – artifact before art – it simply conveys more of its moment to memory.

The perception you've cultivated of an exclusionary small press ethos may involve the interpretation of a relative lack of enthusiasm for the remote (or stock) production, on the part of independent smallies like Bradley & curry say, as the rejection of its art (or argument), when in fact what makes all of us sit up & take notice is the unprecedented effect produced for our delectation (not the world's), which arouses the impulse to make something comparably unique. No hand taking up that challenge of self-reliance is ever turned away! (Not the best place, however, to shine yr replica made by slaves.)

The relevant smallpress movement of our time – primed on curry's inimitable example – sparked a revolution in independence. Those of us influenced by his dedication, vision & industry have tried to stress the value of autonomy, by example & approbation – the stock effect unavoidably less compelling, in contrast, for ignoring (or rejecting) his advance. Which hardly portends exclusion.

Tho yr comments were obviously casual (overcast with a froth of suds), i hope these exceptions won't keep us from lifting a few more together in future. But even if we can't (time being what it is) let me raise my glass to the work you seem to feel i don't appreciate: despite the odd constructive criticism, i find everything you've done that i've seen, unequivocally inspiring.

MONDAY 13 OCTOBER 03

REALITY CHECK

Dear Barbara, congratulations! An impressive addition to the endless debate. Did they award you the coveted calipers of exemplary authority for yr effort (you didn't say) – in otherwords, do i now address you as eminent *dottore*?

I've read it thru & find the work overall a most commendable sift. The errors in data or transcription don't diminish the thesis, yr framework establishing a sound construct for the details you've incorporated. I like the shift from historical to categorical (chapters 2/3 to 4), and find the appendix of interviews informing – for the pointed questions addressed. (Leads one to wonder however just what Barry and Darren in fact know about the subject beyond the circle of their own involvements.)

The distinction between independent and small press activity, as you know, comprises a pivot of my investigations – the initiative to publish other writers' work without grants inscribing a far more inspired (& inspiring) communication (& community) than the funded counterpart. Given the surfeit of gov't grease at the disposal of the earnest cultchurl clinger in CaNada (compared say with other 'places'), the map of more seminal efforts pumped with the lubricant of unadulterated intellectual conviction, delimits an exceptional alternative outland – concentrated in the back wards and laneways of Toronto to a greater degree, it is my contention, than anywhere else.

When scholars set out to explore the alternatives, funded foci invariably overshadow the independent enterprises included (most often as alsorans). The funded counterpart – almost always bigger and more prolific – remains unavoidably conspicuous. Yet what are we reviewing here? Scholarship – not unlike reading for pleasure – sites the viewer *in memory,* surveying a prospect of ideas. And memories are *emplaced* – recollection turning on the reflection 'now where did i put that?'.

So if you lump the efforts of the independent alsoran in with those of the funded clone, you transport us to a place which doesn't exist. A place where thema and ana-thema inconceivably nurture as one. Ideas we simply wd never think to put in the same place (an intellectual separation which does not, however, preclude *social* conjunction).

Toronto, projecting a vast vista of neighbourhoods, advances parochial ideas of itself which leave little room for literature or small-press. Yet no one i know harbours a memory of poetry in Toronto which manages to integrate *meaningfully* the disparate initiatives of the grant-driven and grant-resilient smallpress. Just as Reichstag and ghetto arbitrarily combine to produce an 'integral' locality, these initiatives prove mutually exclusive.

The 'place' you went when you were here (which i believe inspired you to focus on the poetry in this 'place') has been subsumed in yr work by the context such a thesis demands. It's inevitable! the conspicuous nodes in the cultural topography (such as Lee, Atwood, Page & Callaghan; or Harbourfront and the Scream) lending an air of authority to responsible scholarship which proves unassailable alongside alternatives like Ron Giii, john curry or Mark Laba!! But i say it was the artists who persist in communing beyond grants who've effected an independent community which not only inspired you but also motivated not a few of those who went on to conceive some of the more 'dependent' enterprises here-abouts (such as the Scream).

Darren's impatience with 'outsiders' who appear dependent on the establishment illustrates just how myopic those supposedly involved in smallpress can be in their assessments of the scene. Overlooking the fact that the publications i've had printed at Coach House cost $15,000 – which speaks to independence rather than dependence – he has failed even to entertain the relation of the anti-art enterprise to the status quo. Most LETTERS publications were produced without any affiliation to Coach House, books i did on my own at various printshops or photo-copy joints in strident opposition to the authority of techno-centric industrialists like Stan. Failing to evaluate fairly my use of the machinery

of the enemy, so-to-speak (during the 3 periods of my so-called employment at Coach House – which as you know were all undertaken either to study the press from within, or to pay off printjobs), Darren blurs the line between adversarial ideals without giving any thot to the possibility that i wd unquestionably have produced elsewhere every one of my guerrilla publications done covertly at Coach House, had i not appropriated Stan's machinery.

The relation of anti-art to the establishment, as he shd know better than most, can only be charitably misconstrued as a *function* of the status quo (*ie,* dependent upon it) in a world where opponents at war are similarly perceived. His reference to "audience" discloses the bias which so many of those who fail to make a distinction between the commercial smallpress and its opposition, batten upon: they view the artist as someone who cdn't exist without an audience. The production view: art as product; the author nothing if not marketable. Which is entirely outer-directed; whereas the distinction the independent smallie sustains is one of unmitigated initiative – beyond recognition or reward. Art has more to do with conductivity than productivity, the inner-directed view maintaining that art is a way of seeing & that radiant insight is unquestionably worth the investment (*ie,* publishing) regardless of how many people share it. A distinction which involves making yr contribution to the ethos in terms of initiative, energy and (most significantly, in terms of grant dependency) means. How much of yr income *you* invest in the ethos; not howmuch you've bin granted to manage the funded enterprise.

Darren and his gang rode out of the Academy into the language aggressively, eager to rise to positions of recognition and respect regardless of who they might displace. They took the field like literature was a soccer match, the hot young turks challenging all comers, with degrees to rival every authority. They play at poetry without concern for insight, running entirely on wit, their compositions barely rising above the computer games they cut their teeth on. Spouting credibility by association, they hold that to have studied the masters amounts to becoming one,

assuming positions of 'power' wherever possible to insinuate themselves in the litry landscape with every credential in the book (except integrity). Yet they remain curiously oblivious – perhaps because they move in packs – to what lies beyond their view.

Darren's education didn't prepare him for the struggle for access to the machinery of publication (rendering him constitutionally antagonistic to the notion), because those in the Academy have never distinguished the independent press from the smaller commercial press which perpetuates the conceit of centralized authority. It simply has never occurred to any of them to consider it a factor. His consuming pride as publisher at Coach House illustrates how deeply he endorses a centralized model of culture.

He encountered the issue at the smallpress fairs & came to treat it – as anyone whose æsthetic has been entrenched by doctrine – as peripheral to the focal absorption of...impressing one's peers. Belatedly compelled, however, to address this preoccupation with technology (if only to dismiss it), he sot peremptorily, like several of his Academic colleagues, to deride an ideological devotion to independence, purely on appearances. Like Cain, he fails to appreciate that the so-called outsider stance embodies a commitment to effect an ethos beyond such ulterior inducements as reward and recognition.

His dismissal of the independent press of the past 60 years is all the more ludicrous given the presumption to advance himself as its representative: *"Small Press authors who don't want government funding are basically living in their own little hypocritical bubble, because the only reason they get to do what they do is because that funding is there. They can't go off and pretend that they are outsiders: that's just more romantic bullshit, as far as I'm concerned."*

Barbara, you don't deserve this diatribe, but i can't leave such things unsettled. Your work unintentionally endorses the 'authority' of frauds like Darren and Barry, like many other studies of CanLit, simply because pontifications such as these manage to endure on the record. Without a rejoinder from those of us who merely appear in the history as foot-

notes, the matter runs the risk of passing to posterity as gospel. Although yr thesis fixes on a greater number of the alternatives than most similar studies, this distinction between inner- and outer-directed smallies is not rendered focal or explicit enough to put remarks like Darren's in perspective.

The past 5 months have bin too harsh to let slights like his slide. After wrecking my back at the press December 12th (on a job i *told* them wd cripple me...) i was forced to convalesce for a month (without pay), before returning to work intermittently between January 12th and 29th when i reinjured it even more severely. Turning my head to the left or at a certain angle, caused the room to spin & i'd fall over; my back and left shoulder in constant pain. Turns out there's ligament damage at 2 places in my back & bone spurs amassed in my shoulder causing excruciating pain (rotator cuff) & arthritis. Course the good folks at Coach House merely berated me for doing the job they'd asked me to do (John's response: "well why'd you do it if you knew it wd cause problems?"), never for a moment concerning themselves with the fact that it left me without income over the holidays. Souster came thru, however, with 2 boxes of canned goods, going to even greater trouble to get a neighbour to drive him over with them (despite his blindness and being bent almost in half from his own deteriorating spine).

After 2 tenuous weeks back at the press i got a severe toothache forcing me to go to the clinic at the University of Toronto where students practice on the poor. First they filled it, but that made it even more painful (compelling me to sit up all night drinking the last of the bottle of liqueur i've had around here maybe 10 yrs, until the clinic opened again in the morning). Then they assigned me to this idiot 4th-yr student who had never apparently done an extraction. Took him 8 shots with the needle trying to hit a nerve before he finally called his supervisor in to remind him how to administer freezing. Finally after 2 full hours of yanking & prying (during which he berated me for making his hand sore...) he managed to break the tooth off at the roots, drawing the supervisor back to instruct him on how to saw out part of the lower jaw

to extract the shards. He failed miserably at that as well, of course, his colleagues in the room staring wide-eyed in disbelief at the botch he was making of a simple extraction, yet he bristled at every proffered suggestion, insisting he had to learn! After 4 hrs in the dentist chair i stumbled into the street with a cavernous gloam & pain in the neck, more than a trifle disoriented. Two operations ended up costing $140 with antiobiotics, which may sound cheap by industry standards, but hit me hard – especially since it kept me off work 4 more days.

Meanwhile, assuming i might be having a stroke back in January, i frantically put together two supplements in support of the thesis to *God's Wand* & managed against all odds to produce small editions of each – to no avail, alas. Not a word from anyone i sent copies to…

Disappointments, injuries, no money & the spectre of stroke compelling me to work under extreme duress, all leaving me far too raw to ignore Darren's peremptory comments. His lack of discrimination in this matter quite possibly exemplifies the attention to detail he brings to much of his other hastily informed pontifications.

The struggle remains to take possession of the press at all cost & undermine both the conceit of centralized authority & conventional expression. My infiltration of Coach House might be viewed an act of occupation behind enemy lines. Darren forgets that none of my covert activity at the press is sanctioned. And though it may appear for the moment that my use of their press sustains what can only be termed dependency (in the sense that a thief might be dependent upon his victim), i've bin consumed with opening access to the press & subverting the authority of the elect, from the first moment i started publishing back in the 60s.

Darren still doesn't appreciate that the study of experiment is light years removed from the spirit of experiment, that Academic fluency with anti-art doesn't qualify him to speak for those who devote themselves to repudiating rank facility. Nor does he seem to distinguish between those who labour interminably to express the distillates of insight and those who merely jostle for a tit – the civilizing ferment of ideas dependent

upon publishers who challenge the status quo for all that consensus might fail to include. And this doesn't mean publishing *exercises* in experimental writing like he focused on during his term at Coach House (a decidedly doctrinaire contingency). Jazz sensibility, he may one-day discover, is hardly the same as jazz study.

His references to the social predicate of culture betrays an ignorance of the model invoked (apart from closing hermits like Emily Dickinson & Sam Beckett in company they might find pressing), 'social order' intimating a vertical construct which those of us who advance the alternative model of lateral community, emphatically reject. His failure to appreciate the dynamic liberty of community – every communication effecting a responsible community of at least two – points i think to the characteristic assumption of those engrossed with social standing. I know he was talking about the unique opportunity Toronto affords writers to live as writers, but i take exception to his terms because he entered the debate with preconceptions which bear examining: conventional assertions the so-called outsiders have long contested, for their production-based, centralized-authoritarian, vertically-stratified cultural bias. Yet he feels eminently qualified to evaluate the motives of those of us who abjure consensus...

"The only real outsiders in Canadian literary culture, I can basically name them all: it is Nicky and jwcurry, on the West Coast maybe Gerry Gilbert. There were a handful of people like that, but at the same time, their very existence is predicated on the existence of places like Coach House, that affirm that they are important and will give them jobs occasionally. The communities of people that evolve around places like Coach House, reading, writing and publishing there, they are the only ones who give a shit about people like Nicky. Their audience comes from a kind of obligate parasitical relationship to these presses. So they are not outsiders, they are very much a part of that little eco-system and they couldn't exist without it. There is a need for a reality check."

This is obviously about me (neither curry nor Gerry having ever held jobs at Coach House), but it doesn't feel like me. I shd clarify that 2 of

my 3 stints of employment at the press occurred at *their* urging: the first time in 1989 because Stan needed someone to evaluate the backlist; & the present term because they needed help over the Christmas 2000 rush. I stayed 2 years the first time to glean insights into the place (determined to complete a detailed study of the press); & remain there today, as you know, because i still owe $900 for *God's Wand.* The second term of employment (1994–6) resulted from a commissioned job i had brought into the press to print, Stan preferring me to typeset the thing in-house to avoid problems of reflow. That was during the planning stage of getting the lane named, a process which i reflexively contributed to. Then i stayed on to work off the cost of producing my publication of Gerry Gilbert's *Sex & the Single Mushroom,* after which i remained because they'd come to depend on my services. This is considerably removed from Darren's impression that my "very existence is predicated on the existence of places like Coach House, that affirm that [i am] important and will give [me] jobs occasionally".

The reality is that thru the rest of the 90s i had little trouble meeting my expenses & producing innumerable publications, from catalogue & Internet sales. Darren seems to forget that i established a bookshop on my own initiative devoted to esoteric literature without help from Coach House or anyone else in the litry establishment. In fact, my bookshop was conspicuous in generating the same sort of "communities of people that evolve around places like Coach House, reading, writing and publishing there" who he contends "are the only ones who give a shit about people like [me]". Darren considers this "a kind of obligate parasitical relationship to these presses" (again excluding the shop), & goes on to conclude that people like me are therefore "not outsiders, they are very much a part of that little eco-system and they couldn't exist without it". But wait! Substituting 'bookshop' for 'press' in his diatribe, does it not seem moderately irrational to indict the proprietor as a parasite of his own enterprise...

The movement dedicated to cultural independence includes LETTERS as well as Coach House, curry's Room 302, Bradley's Pangen Subway &

Owen's Martin Garth (to name only a few). In fact, if you refer to my letter to Stephen Cain, you will see that Stan was one of the original 8 so-called outsiders in attendance at the inaugural meet on the tracks back in '93, & that if anything meaningful is signified by the term it also pertains to Stan. Darren knows nothing, apparently, of these details, but rather prefers to endorse a far more centralized ethos where a few focal presses assume most of the authority. He sides with a Coach-House-dominated view perhaps because one cd ideally get a job there, whereas the rest of us run one-man operations. But our imperative differs further from Stan's in that we advocate (by example) taking the initiative & starting yr own press, as the soundest alternative to centralized culture. Which makes us outsiders in the extreme, because that's clearly outside the purview of Central Dispatch. Why, it fairly smacks of 'vanity'! The utter *impertinence* of veritable upstarts condescending to circumvent protocol! So we're categorically dismissed as amateurs & alsorans, which further substantiates our reputation as outsiders.

I'm trying to show by dwelling so minutely on this brief disclosure, that the discriminations Darren brings to the task of cultural evaluation, might just prove equally rash & unfounded. He appears, in fact, ill equipped to pass judgement on the broader cultural matters at large, beyond those specialties he was officially licenced by the Academy to recognize. Every generation presents us with another set of presumptuous authorities whose primary imperative is to have their brilliance recognized rather than sound out the depths of the cultural ethos they come to inhabit – the predatory cult of credibility by association. And in CaNada, particularly, they manage to thrive & prosper without impediment or hindrance.

Yet Darren has unwittingly risen to my bait, the 'outsider' imperative intentionally a provocation to induce others to reconsider those they reflexively leave out. The chronic exclusivity of the poetry scene in Toronto has irritated me since day one. Working in the porno book-stores on Yonge from '73 thru '76 gave me an opportunity to address the incongruity by representing a diversity of imprints & scenes together.

The point has always bin to accumulate the activity & insights of every conductor in the language both to reveal the breadth of our culture & to put each contribution in context. Darren fails to appreciate that I accomplished this on my own initiative, beyond the sanction of the owners (the Mafia): that – very much like conditions at Coach House – i infiltrated the organization specifically to redress this cultural lacuna. In either case, an outsider scheming to expropriate the resources at hand to a more inclusive vision of the word.

I ordered books & magazines from over 100 independent publishers, maintaining the enormous correspondence on my own while seeing to it that accounts were settled to the poets' advantage (often in cash). Such a variety of esoteric imprints in one place had a salutary effect on the scene, attested to both in Greg Gatenby's distorted memoir & Marc Glassman's admission that his shop Pages was in part modelled on my example. Formation of the Canadian Periodical Publishers' Association also followed my initiative, a government-funded enterprise established to distribute many of the magazines i had imported independently. Yet rather than appreciate how much more precarious it might have been to insinuate independently-produced books & magazines into a mob-run facility where the owners remained largely in the dark about what i had enlisted them to support, my detractors expediently dwell on the isolated detail that i was "employed in the porno trade", while celebrating without the slightest qualification (such as their source of funding) the 'heroic' enterprise of the Selwood brothers in establishing CPPA.

Likewise with the distribution company a friend & i operated after this, undertaking to represent alternative Canadian rags abroad & at home, on our own initiative, by also distributing a handful of gay porno mags (which paid the bills). Marc Glassman recently introduced me to a friend of his as a one-time porno distributor who also carried a few alternative titles which he agreed to stock back in the early days at his shop, to help me out! Whereas the truth is that we distributed a considerable number of alternative rags which he was always characteristically diffident about stocking (& regularly located at the bottom of his maga-

zine rack). I literally had to hardsell him to accept a measely 3 copies of the first issue of Raw magazine which later went on to win a Pulitzer Prize for Art Spiegleman – the 'support' Marc lent the alternative press back then, notorious (among those of us who offered him things outside the parameters of the conventional booktrade, as other smallies can attest) for its unmitigated poverty of vision.

Nor do those in the smallpress community recollect that when i opened my shop on Queen, i devoted an 8-foot table at the very front of the store to a permanent display of independent smallpress publications – one of the earliest sustaining venues for this stuff in the city. The smallpress bookfair, i contend, took its inspiration in part from this display where so many of the independent publishers first encountered both the work & person of their colleagues in alternative press. Yet because i chose to remain behind the scenes, it proves easier for detractors like Stuart Ross or Maggie Helwig to insist i had little to do with the smallpress group beyond basking in its outlaw glow.

What i'm trying to show is that my determination to dramatize the poverty of an exclusive cultural stance by maintaining a position outside the frame, plays expressly into the hands of those inclined to dismiss me. Yet only a myopic bully, i contend, wd exploit the advantage. Which effectively weeds out those shamelessly devoted to exclusivity.

Darren is vindicated by the record, of course. The outsiders are thoroughly vulnerable – nothing much for researchers at large to relate concerning their activities or effects, among the institutionalized reference works on CanLit. And without a source to cite, the responsible scholar has little recourse but to gloss the account, the unsubstantiated inclusion of outsider insights tainting research with distinct odours of presumptuous authority. Without records we have little more than memory to resort to, a place far too fleeting for the publish-or-perish imperative of the institutional authoritarian.

And for those who refuse to lay claim to anything even remotely resembling a focal place in the ethos, they are relegated to roles of menial significance in the recollection of the subscribers to almighty

consensus, who – despite having enjoyed the benefits of the outsider's initiatives – reflexively defer to the official accounts which consistently fail to acknowledge any greater contribution. Taking exception to the concept of focality, or disputing the *imperative* of recognition, emphatically do not, however, imply a desire to have one's contributions displaced (or worse, demeaned).

The mission, i repeat, is to wrest control from those who maintain the conceit of a centralized ethos – my infiltration of Coach House undertaken in large part to subvert the authority of the host. Not something you profitably measure in terms of ingratitude but of necessity – the machinery of exclusive authority long overdue for dismantling.

In case you haven't considered it before, ask yourself why the people who amass the machinery of production shd decide who get published. In Stan's case, publishing grants ($91,000 from the Canada Council alone this year) secure business for his printshop. Those he hires to vet & edit submissions (like Darren) conveniently insure the employment of Stan's production staff. Of course the editorial crew sees to it that the best of what they're offered gets published, but another thing to bear in mind is the fact that esoteric or experimental literature inevitably makes its way to Coach House regardless of who sits in judgement (Christian's first book, *Crystallography,* having bin published incongruously by Margaret McClintock). So that, if i'm right, cultural decisions are made, to a large degree, to serve technocrats. Which is the case throughout the trade: the cultural grant, in effect, supporting technology (from paper makers to binders), because the lion's share of publishing costs goes to book production. Which, because of strictures emplaced by the granting bodies (such as, that editions must conform to UNESCO standards of 400 or 500 copies at least), & by box superstores whose ordering protocols extend printruns to a minimum of 600 or 700 (to accommodate consistent 'placement' among 300 branches, despite the limited market for the usual poetry book), leads to excessive overproduction – which, of course, suits the technocrat just fine.

Darren typifies the collaborator in this scenario whereas i characterize the resistance. Which might explain why he tries to tar me with his brush, portraying my activities at the press as no less dependent on Stan than his own (tho decidedly inferior). I think he's become sensitive to his complicity in the scheme, faintly recognizing that his distinction as the hallowed 'publisher' at Coach House was little more than the mark of another hot young turk greasing the wheels of the infernal grant machine for the big boys like Stan who were smart enough to speculate in technology. For his part, i shd add, Stan has long recognized his privilege & almost alone among the so-called big boys, has made every effort to give back to the arts community whenever possible. I respect him a lot, but am constitutionally incapable of defaulting to his cocked vision of a centralized ethos.

Darren assumes a self-righteous tone of contempt for 'one low enough to bite the hand that feeds him'. Yet i've contributed immeasurably to Coach House over the past 31 years, taking the initiative to examine & record press activities when those in charge held that it was anathema to reduce their revolutionary imperatives to the static of a retrospective view. Nor can the sale of my collection to the National Libry be said to have detracted from the official reception of subsequent Coach House overtures to the Canada Council. Apart from these investments i've co-operated & collaborated with Stan on a number of projects, & alone among press employees, spent $15,000 over the years, producing editions i initiated. My thanks for this, however, is not only to be relegated to menial servitude in the bindery at the lowest pay in the place (until very recently), but also to be left under no illusions about my expendability (no compensation during periods of convalescence from injuries suffered on the job, no vacation pay, *etc*). It is in this climate that i feel little compunction about appropriating Stan's machinery from time to time.

Darren grudgingly allows that i know "more about the Canadian small press than anybody I've ever met. Probably more than anybody in the country. He's a national treasure, you know, but nobody knows him.

That's the thing" – reducing culture yet again to a function of recognition. Over the years i've come to consider this a backhand compliment. The same admission regularly issues from my colleagues in the antiquarian booktrade when i challenge my omission from their ranks. How expediently this deflects the issue of my expertise in the booktrade beyond smallpress; in the theory & editorial appreciation of the craft of writing; in critical insight into the art of poetry (impinging on Darren's acumen); in typography; bibliography; cultural history; cultural evaluation; distribution; the politics of publishing, *etc.* Seems the inclination among both colleagues & employers is to identify me with the margin. Which has a cumulative effect at large: supporting perceptions others (like the TSPG administrators) retail, in demeaning my contributions to community: those who claim to run things, only willing to include me in their view of culture, apparently, in a menial or ancillary capacity.

If you were to polarize these inclinations, you might notice that the competitive spirit is readily valorized where the co-operative attitude is quite often interpreted as a sign of submission or subservience.

You'll see from the enclosed article that Coach House is presently under threat of expropriation, Stan putting up a determined fight, though his admission that if worse comes to worse "we'll all just retire & live happily ever after" leaves considerable room for reassurance. Meanwhile my negotiations with Fisher Rare Book Libry falter on issues of duplication & evaluation.

Fitting that i shd end this rant the day after the spring smallpress fair, curry in town (so Barlow informs me by phone) for the first time in a year, tho my debilities keep me from venturing out. You must realize that nothing i've said in this letter shd be construed as directed at you or yr work. I'm delighted with yr thesis, beaming with pride & joy to reflect on yr interest in CanLit. I applaud you Barbara, yr work every bit the measure of initiative which i hold in such high esteem. I am flattered; we, the poets of CaNada are flattered; interest like yrs, precisely what we've dreamed for in our ruddy backwood forts these past 200 years digging our self-reflecting snow & beaver goo. Decidedly hollow since

we abandoned the queen, our echo up the Grand Canal swells the litry
inclination of local little winds to fresh aspirations beneath the skirts
of a more exotic muse.

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imaginary letters will
ever be published

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